



Arms Trade Treaty Preparatory Committee 13-17 February 2012 Side Event 15 February 2012

Monitoring an ATT: The Role of Public Health and Civil Society

This side event focused on the how an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) could have a positive impact on public health. Presentations were given by Dr. Robert Mtonga of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), Dr. Omolade Oladejo of the Nigerian Ministry of Defence, Dr. Mirjana Dokmanovic of IANSA and Dr. Donald Mellman of IPPNW USA. The conclusion was that an effective ATT, once implemented, has the potential to help improve public health.

Dr. Mellman asserted that NGOs will play an important role in monitoring and assessing the implementation of the ATT, because of their experience with this type of work and the tools they have already developed. He discussed dispute settlement between civil society and states over violations of the ATT, arguing that as disputes are bound to arise (mainly over human rights), NGOs must be prepared for mediation. Mediators should understand languages and the culture of the parties involved and be able to retain impartiality and follow a strategic pathway to achieve a settlement.

Dr. Mtonga and Dr. Oladejo shared their experience as medical professionals of horrific injuries and deaths caused by gun violence. They both argued that the adoption of an ATT is central to improving public health, in its potential to help reduce armed violence and free up resources to other areas of public health that need attention. Dr. Mtonga emphasised that public health is more than disease prevention, and should be seen as the state of physical, social and mental well being. He asserted that as public health is a humanitarian issue a strong ATT will directly support international human rights and international humanitarian law.

Dr. Dokmanovic highlighted the importance of civil society in monitoring the ATT and insisted that this be done from a humanitarian perspective. She argued that the ATT should be more than a simple international regulatory framework for the arms trade, as the arms trade is closely linked to issues of peace, regional stability, public health, human security, human rights and gender. As states are bound by rules of international humanitarian law, they should be obliged to control the trade of arms, particularly small arms, to prevent them from being used to violate international humanitarian law. She argued that this is particularly important when armed violence is used against civilians. Thus, following the “golden rule” of criteria in the ATT, defined by civil society, will the best way States can move forward: any international transfers of arms or ammunition should not be authorised when there is a substantial risk they will be used in serious violations of human rights or international humanitarian law.